

2014-15

Undergraduate Degree Earners

REPORT

NATIONAL STUDENT CLEARINGHOUSE®
RESEARCH CENTER™

First-time Graduates and Graduates with Prior Awards

The total number of undergraduate degree earners has remained nearly constant over the last four years, with 2,804,133 students earning associate and bachelor's degrees in 2014-15, a 0.3 percent increase from 2011-12. However, the number of those graduates who had earned prior awards grew by 12.4 percent in that timeframe, while the number of first-time graduates — students earning their first undergraduate degree — has fallen by 2.6 percent (**Figure 1**). This means that as a percentage of all undergraduate degree earners, students who were earning additional undergraduate degrees on top of prior awards grew from 19.5 percent in 2011-12 to 21.8 percent in 2014-15 (**Figure 2**).

Of students who earned a bachelor's degree in 2014-15, 76.5 percent were first-time graduates (had no prior award), 3.2 percent had previously earned a bachelor's degree or higher, 18.9 percent had previously earned an associate degree, and 1.4 percent had previously earned a certificate (**Figure 3**). Of students who earned an associate degree in 2014-15, 81.4 percent were first-time graduates (had no prior award), 3.5 percent had previously earned a bachelor's degree or higher, 7.0 percent had previously earned an associate degree, and 8.1 percent had previously earned a certificate (**Figure 4**).

First-time graduate trends varied by age group and gender (**Tables 2-7**). Over the four-year period in this report, the count of first-time

graduates (associate and bachelor's degrees combined) increased 4.3 percent for students under the age of 25, but decreased for all other age groups. Taken as a whole, first-time graduates in the 25 and over categories dropped 15.4 percent since 2011-12, reflecting postrecession enrollment declines among older students. By gender, the count of first-time graduates decreased 4.0 percent for women, and decreased 0.5 percent for men.

About the Data

Based on student-level enrollment and degree data from the National Student Clearinghouse, the *Undergraduate Degree Earners Report* differentiates between students earning their first postsecondary award and students earning additional undergraduate awards on top of ones earned in prior years. Each student is counted as a first-time graduate only once, in the academic year of his or her first postsecondary award. In **Figures 1 and 2** only recipients of associate and bachelor's degrees are counted as first-time graduates. However, the prior awards which distinguish first-time graduates from repeat graduates include both degrees and certificates. Counts may differ from those reported in earlier versions of this report, to reflect additional historical data reported to the Clearinghouse since publication. More information on Clearinghouse degree coverage and definitions can be found in the notes section at the end of this report.

Figure 1: Number of First-Time Graduates and Graduates with Prior Awards

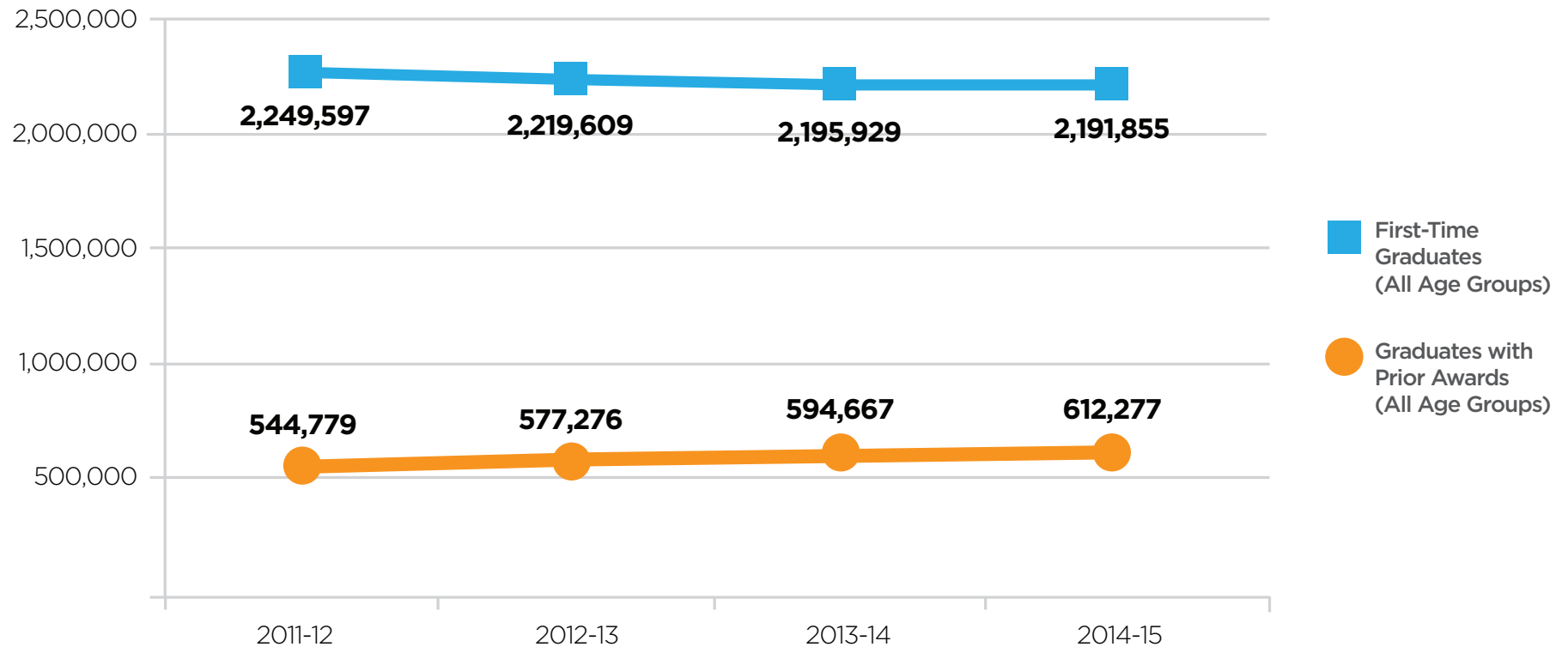


Figure 1 shows counts of students earning undergraduate degrees (bachelor's and associates combined) in each academic year, disaggregated by first-time graduate status. The number of first-time graduates has been falling, while the number of graduates with prior awards (which may include degrees or certificates) has continued a postrecession increase.

Figure 2: Distribution of Undergraduate Degree Earners by Prior Award Status

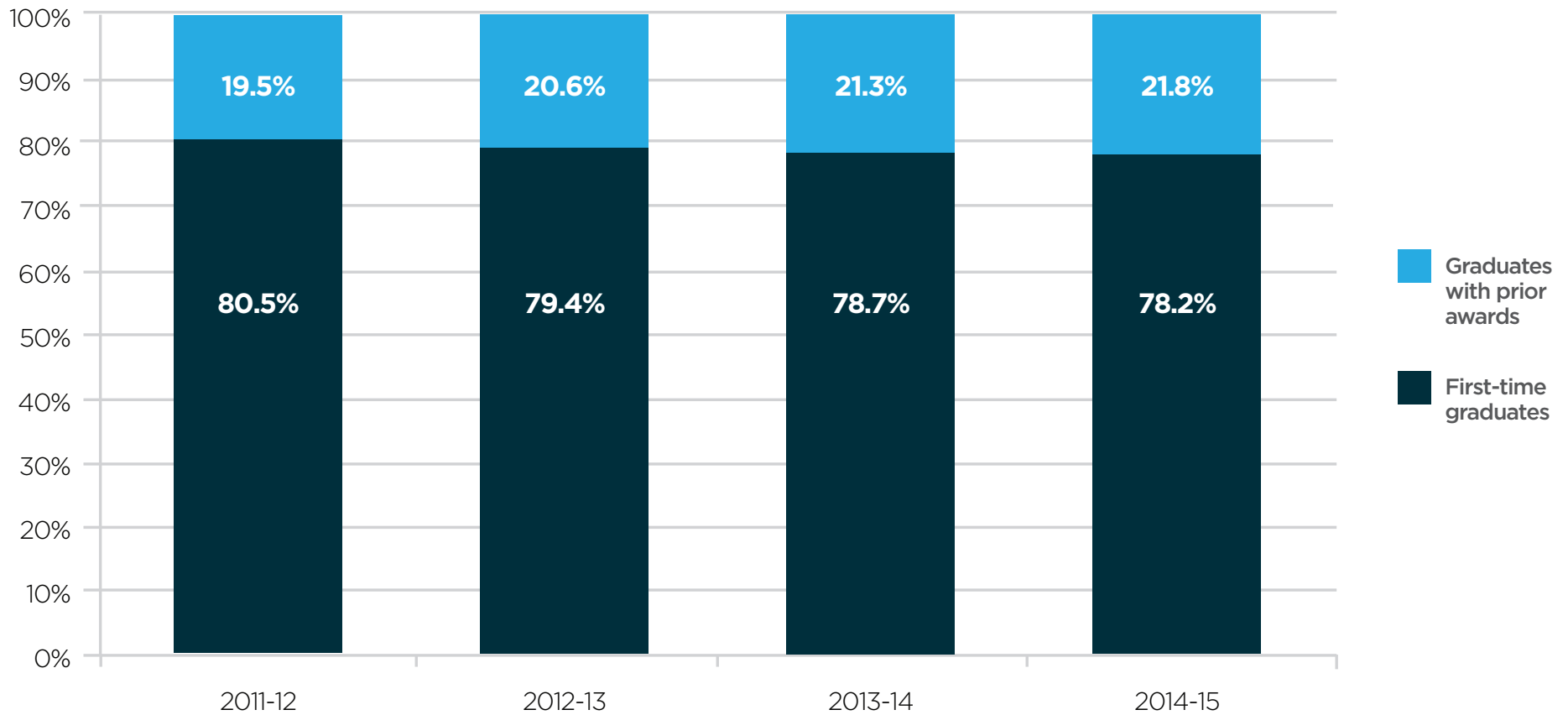


Figure 2 shows that in 2011-12, 19.5 percent of all bachelor's and associate degree recipients were students who had already earned a postsecondary award in a previous year. By 2014-15, students with prior awards accounted for 21.8 percent of all undergraduate degree recipients.

Figure 3: Bachelor's Degree Earners - Distribution of Prior Awards

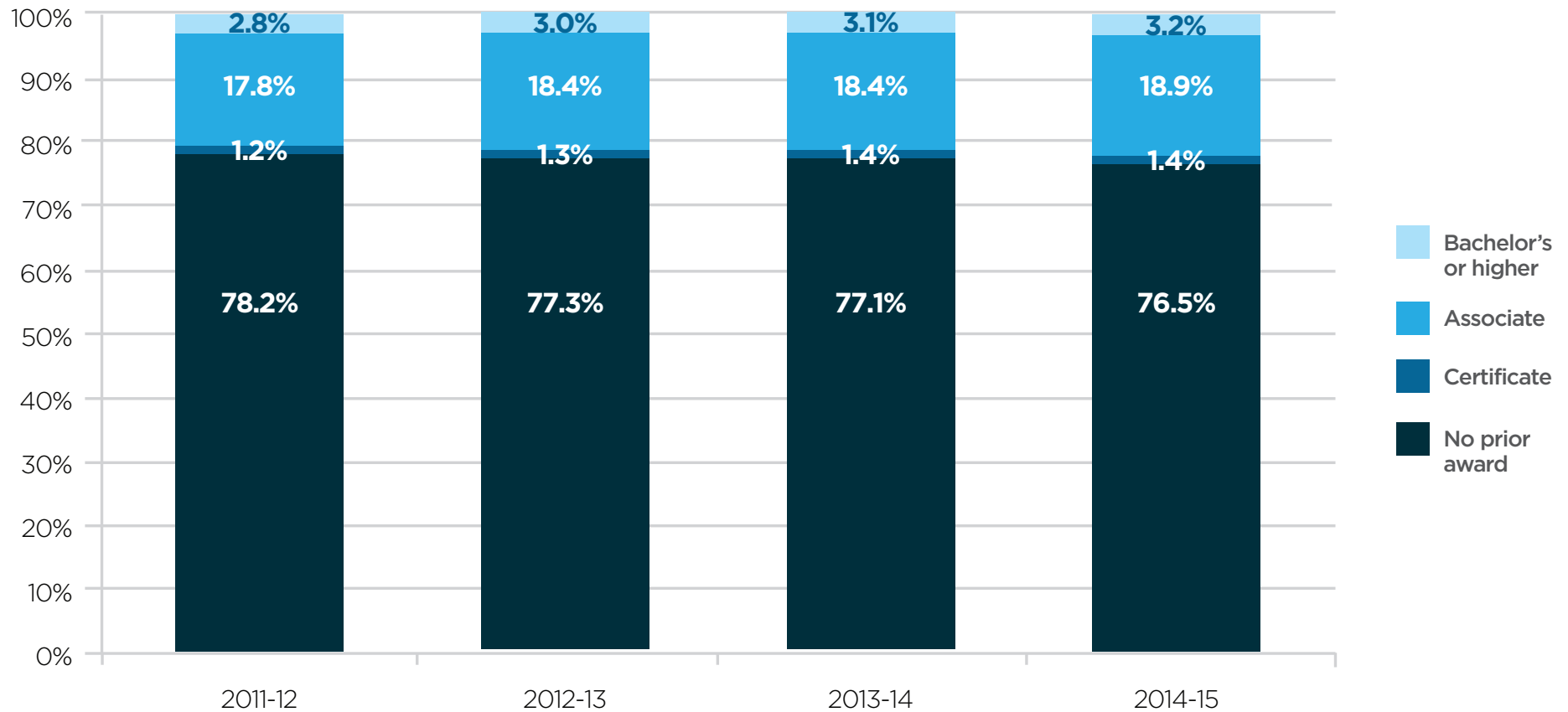


Figure 3 shows the percentage distribution of prior awards for students who earned a bachelor's degree in each of the last four academic years. In 2014-15, 76.5 percent were first-time graduates (had no prior award), 3.2 percent had previously earned a bachelor's degree or higher, 18.9 percent had previously earned an associate degree, and 1.4 percent had previously earned a certificate.

Figure 4: Associate Degree Earners - Distribution of Prior Awards

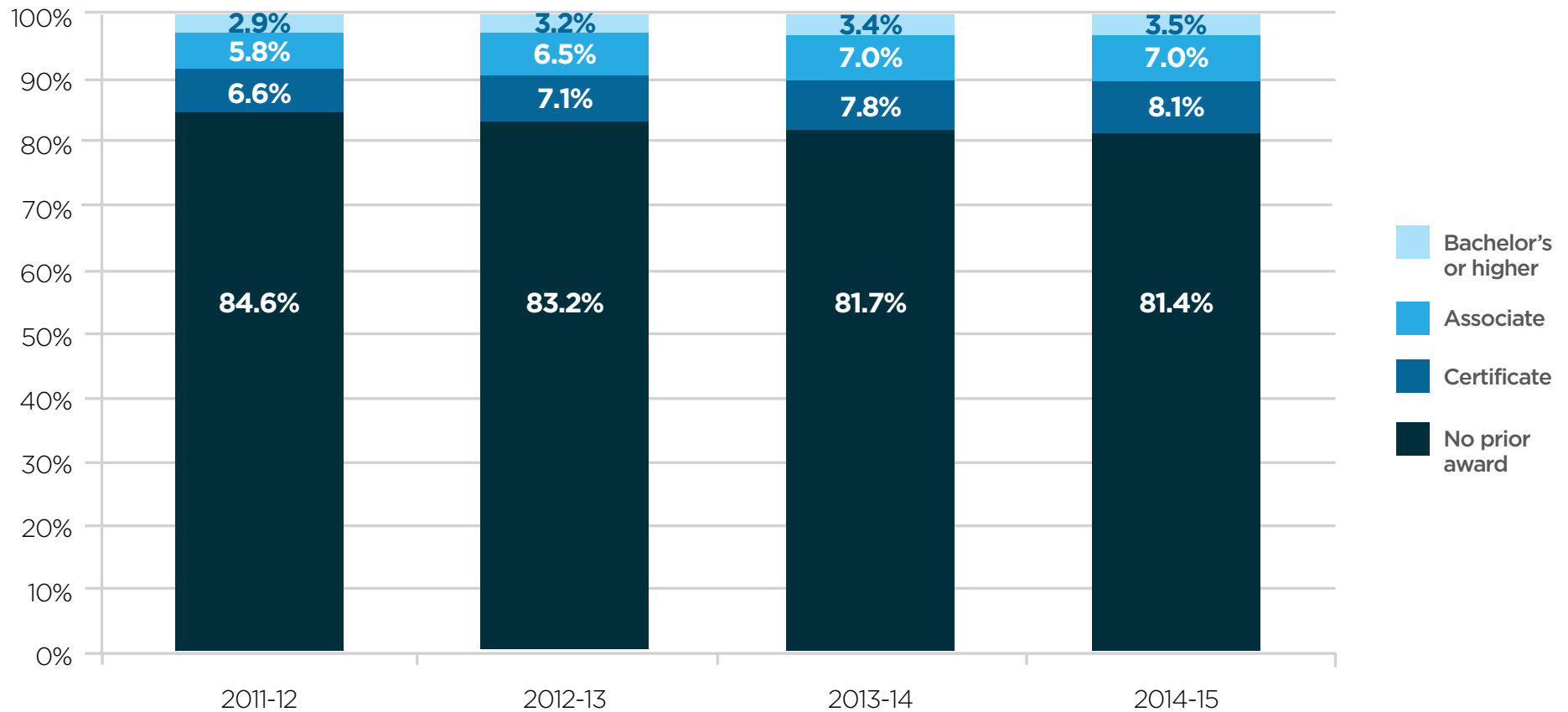


Figure 4 shows the percentage distribution of prior awards for students who earned an associate degree in each of the last four academic years. In 2014-15, 81.4 percent were first-time graduates (had no prior award), 3.5 percent had previously earned a bachelor's degree or higher, 7.0 percent had previously earned an associate degree, and 8.1 percent had previously earned a certificate.

Table 1: Undergraduate Degree Earners by Level of Prior Award

	2011-12		2012-13		2013-14		2014-15	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
BACHELOR'S DEGREE EARNERS								
Prior Master's	2,970	0.2%	3,405	0.2%	3,344	0.2%	3,476	0.2%
Prior Bachelor's	47,864	2.7%	51,476	2.8%	53,353	2.9%	54,969	3.0%
Prior Associate	318,000	17.8%	335,137	18.4%	336,959	18.4%	349,211	18.9%
Prior Certificate	21,178	1.2%	23,457	1.3%	25,089	1.4%	26,400	1.4%
First-Time Graduates (No Prior Award)	1,396,795	78.2%	1,407,265	77.3%	1,408,334	77.1%	1,411,441	76.5%
Total Bachelor's Degree Earners	1,786,807	100.0%	1,820,740	100.0%	1,827,079	100.0%	1,845,497	100.0%
ASSOCIATE DEGREE EARNERS								
Prior Master's	2,336	0.2%	2,486	0.3%	2,691	0.3%	2,935	0.3%
Prior Bachelor's	27,261	2.7%	28,384	2.9%	30,063	3.1%	30,525	3.2%
Prior Associate	58,357	5.8%	63,557	6.5%	67,608	7.0%	66,852	7.0%
Prior Certificate	66,814	6.6%	69,373	7.1%	75,559	7.8%	77,910	8.1%
First-Time Graduates (No Prior Award)	852,801	84.6%	812,344	83.2%	787,595	81.7%	780,414	81.4%
Total Associate Degree Earners	1,007,570	100.0%	976,145	100.0%	963,517	100.0%	958,635	100.0%
CERTIFICATE EARNERS								
Prior Master's	12,028	2.3%	13,103	2.5%	15,517	2.9%	15,686	3.0%
Prior Bachelor's	34,678	6.6%	38,219	7.2%	41,262	7.6%	40,770	7.7%
Prior Associate	30,517	5.8%	32,932	6.2%	33,890	6.3%	34,306	6.5%
Prior Certificate	40,564	7.7%	42,931	8.1%	48,039	8.9%	49,223	9.3%
First-Time Graduates (No Prior Award)	411,239	77.7%	404,668	76.1%	402,359	74.4%	388,345	73.5%
Total Certificate Degree Earners	529,026	100.0%	531,855	100.0%	541,067	100.0%	528,330	100.0%

Table 1 provides counts of undergraduate degree earners grouped by the level of their most recent prior award (if any). Students with no prior award are first-time graduates. Academic years run from July 1 to June 30. In this report, certificate refers to undergraduate and graduate-level certificates, since it was not possible for institutions to make this distinction in Clearinghouse data submissions prior to 2013-14. Certificate earners with no prior awards are classified as first-time graduates.

Table 2: Count of First-Time Graduates Earning Bachelor's Degrees by Gender, Age, and Institutional Sector

	2011-12	Change from Prior Year	2012-13	Change from Prior Year	2013-14	Change from Prior Year	2014-15	Change from Prior Year
OVERALL								
First-Time Graduates Earning Bachelor's Degrees	1,396,795	3.9%	1,407,265	0.7%	1,408,334	0.1%	1,411,441	0.2%
GENDER								
Women	782,531	3.8%	786,734	0.5%	782,689	-0.5%	783,052	0.0%
Men	614,264	4.0%	620,531	1.0%	625,644	0.8%	628,390	0.4%
AGE GROUP								
Under 25	1,069,043	3.3%	1,082,713	1.3%	1,104,069	2.0%	1,117,270	1.2%
25-29	141,358	2.4%	140,314	-0.7%	137,002	-2.4%	135,183	-1.3%
30-39	95,273	6.3%	95,403	0.1%	88,242	-7.5%	84,715	-4.0%
40-49	59,275	9.5%	57,506	-3.0%	50,650	-11.9%	46,728	-7.7%
50 and over	28,800	13.4%	29,117	1.1%	26,721	-8.2%	26,197	-2.0%
INSTITUTIONAL SECTOR								
4-Year Public	881,126	3.5%	887,763	0.8%	902,504	1.7%	908,386	0.7%
4-Year Private Nonprofit	436,494	2.3%	440,882	1.0%	445,176	1.0%	446,762	0.4%
4-Year Private For-Profit	77,693	17.4%	77,419	-0.4%	60,184	-22.3%	55,024	-8.6%

Table 2 shows the count of bachelor's degree recipients in each year and category who were first-time graduates. First-time graduates are defined as students who earned a bachelor's degree, associate degree, or certificate as their first postsecondary credential. Each student is counted as a first-time college graduate only once, in the academic year of his or her first postsecondary credential. Academic years run from July 1 to June 30.

Table 3: First-Time Graduates Earning Bachelor’s Degrees as Percentage of All Bachelor’s Degree Earners by Gender, Age, and Sector

	2011-12	Change from Prior Year	2012-13	Change from Prior Year	2013-14	Change from Prior Year	2014-15	Change from Prior Year
OVERALL								
First-Time Graduates Earning Bachelor’s Degrees as Percentage of All Bachelor’s Degree Earners	78.2%	-0.7	77.3%	-0.9	77.1%	-0.2	76.5%	-0.6
GENDER								
Women	76.3%	-1.0	75.3%	-1.0	75.1%	-0.2	74.4%	-0.7
Men	80.6%	-0.3	79.9%	-0.7	79.7%	-0.3	79.3%	-0.4
AGE GROUP								
Under 25	88.7%	0.3	88.3%	-0.4	88.1%	-0.2	87.9%	-0.2
25-29	57.6%	-1.0	56.3%	-1.2	55.4%	-0.9	54.2%	-1.2
30-39	50.5%	-2.4	48.6%	-1.9	47.0%	-1.6	44.8%	-2.2
40-49	59.8%	-2.0	57.6%	-2.3	54.6%	-2.9	51.9%	-2.7
50 and over	65.2%	-1.0	62.5%	-2.7	61.6%	-0.9	59.9%	-1.7
INSTITUTIONAL SECTOR								
4-Year Public	78.2%	-0.3	77.1%	-1.1	76.4%	-0.7	75.6%	-0.7
4-Year Private Nonprofit	83.4%	-0.5	82.6%	-0.8	82.0%	-0.6	81.4%	-0.6
4-Year Private For-Profit	57.9%	-1.9	58.1%	0.2	59.2%	1.1	59.7%	0.5

Table 3 shows the percentage of bachelor’s degree recipients in each year and category who were first-time graduates. First-time graduates are defined as students who earned a bachelor’s degree, associate degree, or certificate as their first postsecondary credential. Each student is counted as a first-time graduate only once, in the academic year of his or her first postsecondary credential. Academic years run from July 1 to June 30.

Table 4: Count of First-Time Graduates Earning Associate Degrees by Gender, Age, and Sector

	2011-12	Change from Prior Year	2012-13	Change from Prior Year	2013-14	Change from Prior Year	2014-15	Change from Prior Year
OVERALL								
First-Time Graduates Earning Associate Degrees	852,801	9.1%	812,344	-4.7%	787,595	-3.0%	780,414	-0.9%
GENDER								
Women	517,052	8.9%	490,572	-5.1%	470,975	-4.0%	463,918	-1.5%
Men	335,750	9.4%	321,772	-4.2%	316,620	-1.6%	316,496	0.0%
AGE GROUP								
Under 25	403,496	6.4%	397,827	-1.4%	408,528	2.7%	418,389	2.4%
25-29	150,675	9.2%	142,022	-5.7%	135,555	-4.6%	133,679	-1.4%
30-39	162,099	12.1%	149,412	-7.8%	136,559	-8.6%	130,473	-4.5%
40-49	91,485	14.0%	81,512	-10.9%	70,628	-13.4%	64,324	-8.9%
50 and over	42,421	18.5%	38,403	-9.5%	34,242	-10.8%	31,680	-7.5%
INSTITUTIONAL SECTOR								
4-Year Public	104,872	15.3%	102,717	-2.1%	105,910	3.1%	112,121	5.9%
4-Year Private Nonprofit	37,748	14.3%	37,301	-1.2%	37,390	0.2%	36,853	-1.4%
4-Year Private For-Profit	126,740	7.1%	106,401	-16.0%	72,500	-31.9%	62,602	-13.7%
2-Year Public	513,555	8.2%	515,540	0.4%	522,880	1.4%	517,045	-1.1%

Table 4 shows the percentage of associate degree recipients in each year and category who were first-time graduates. First-time graduates are defined as students who earned a bachelor's degree, associate degree, or certificate as their first postsecondary credential. Each student is counted as a first-time graduate only once, in the academic year of his or her first postsecondary credential. Academic years run from July 1 to June 30.

Table 5: First-Time Graduates Earning Associate Degrees as Percentage of All Associate Degree Earners by Gender, Age, and Sector

	2011-12	Change from Prior Year	2012-13	Change from Prior Year	2013-14	Change from Prior Year	2014-15	Change from Prior Year
OVERALL								
First-Time Graduates Earning Associate Degrees as Percentage of All Associate Degree Earners	84.6%	0.3	83.2%	-1.4	81.7%	-1.5	81.4%	-0.3
GENDER								
Women	83.3%	0.4	81.8%	-1.5	80.3%	-1.6	80.0%	-0.3
Men	86.7%	0.0	85.4%	-1.3	84.0%	-1.4	83.6%	-0.4
AGE GROUP								
Under 25	91.0%	0.7	90.1%	-0.8	89.6%	-0.6	89.6%	0.1
25-29	78.8%	0.6	77.1%	-1.7	75.1%	-2.0	74.5%	-0.6
30-39	78.2%	-0.3	75.9%	-2.2	73.0%	-3.0	71.9%	-1.1
40-49	82.6%	0.1	80.3%	-2.3	76.9%	-3.4	75.0%	-1.9
50 and over	82.6%	0.3	80.5%	-2.1	77.1%	-3.4	75.6%	-1.5
INSTITUTIONAL SECTOR								
4-Year Public	84.0%	-0.1	83.5%	-0.5	83.0%	-0.5	82.4%	-0.6
4-Year Private Nonprofit	85.6%	-0.2	85.1%	-0.5	84.4%	-0.7	84.7%	0.3
4-Year Private For-Profit	94.5%	-0.1	93.3%	-1.2	91.1%	-2.2	89.0%	-2.1
2-Year Public	82.7%	0.5	81.3%	-1.4	80.6%	-0.7	80.1%	-0.5

Table 5 shows the percentage of associate degree recipients in each year and category who were first-time graduates. First-time graduates are defined as students who earned a bachelor's degree, associate degree, or certificate as their first postsecondary credential. Each student is counted as a first-time graduate only once, in the academic year of his or her first postsecondary credential. Academic years run from July 1 to June 30.

Table 6: Count of First-Time Graduates Earning Certificates by Gender, Age, and Sector

	2011-12	Change from Prior Year	2012-13	Change from Prior Year	2013-14	Change from Prior Year	2014-15	Change from Prior Year
OVERALL								
First-Time Graduates Earning Certificates	411,239	-8.8%	404,668	-1.6%	402,359	-0.6%	388,345	-3.5%
GENDER								
Women	245,144	-9.4%	234,221	-4.5%	224,930	-4.0%	225,142	0.1%
Men	166,095	-7.8%	170,448	2.6%	177,430	4.1%	163,203	-8.0%
AGE GROUP								
Under 25	181,076	-7.2%	185,666	2.5%	187,475	1.0%	188,311	0.4%
25-29	68,283	-8.9%	66,301	-2.9%	65,991	-0.5%	64,293	-2.6%
30-39	76,424	-11.2%	73,457	-3.9%	70,906	-3.5%	66,633	-6.0%
40-49	51,267	-10.6%	47,737	-6.9%	45,223	-5.3%	40,468	-10.5%
50 and over	32,766	-8.9%	30,530	-6.8%	31,883	4.4%	27,841	-12.7%
INSTITUTIONAL SECTOR								
4-Year Public	16,497	12.8%	17,470	5.9%	18,536	6.1%	18,743	1.1%
4-Year Private Nonprofit	3,151	-11.2%	2,892	-8.2%	3,642	25.9%	2,755	-24.4%
4-Year Private For-Profit	20,612	-12.4%	22,010	6.8%	21,155	-3.9%	19,947	-5.7%
2-Year Public	248,138	-5.0%	253,013	2.0%	263,034	4.0%	255,455	-2.9%

Table 6 shows the count of certificate recipients in each year and category who were first-time graduates. First-time graduates are defined as students who earned a bachelor's degree, associate degree, or certificate as their first postsecondary credential. Each student is counted as a first-time graduate only once, in the academic year of his or her first postsecondary credential. Academic years run from July 1 to June 30. In this report, certificate refers to undergraduate and graduate-level certificates, since it was not possible for institutions to make this distinction in Clearinghouse data submissions prior to 2013-14. Certificate earners with no prior awards are classified as first-time graduates.

Table 7: First-Time Graduates Earning Certificates as Percentage of All Certificate Earners by Gender, Age, and Sector

	2011-12	Change from Prior Year	2012-13	Change from Prior Year	2013-14	Change from Prior Year	2014-15	Change from Prior Year
OVERALL								
First-Time Graduates Earning Certificates as Percentage of All Certificate Earners	77.7%	-2.0	76.1%	-1.6	74.4%	-1.7	73.5%	-0.9
GENDER								
Women	79.0%	-2.3	76.7%	-2.3	74.6%	-2.0	74.5%	-0.1
Men	76.0%	-1.6	75.3%	-0.7	74.1%	-1.3	72.1%	-1.9
AGE GROUP								
Under 25	86.5%	-1.3	86.6%	0.1	85.7%	-0.8	85.6%	-0.1
25-29	69.1%	-2.7	66.6%	-2.5	65.6%	-1.0	65.1%	-0.5
30-39	69.4%	-3.0	66.2%	-3.2	63.5%	-2.7	61.8%	-1.6
40-49	76.5%	-2.1	73.6%	-2.9	69.6%	-4.0	66.9%	-2.7
50 and over	78.0%	-2.1	75.1%	-3.0	72.8%	-2.2	69.5%	-3.3
INSTITUTIONAL SECTOR								
4-Year Public	47.8%	-0.7	46.0%	-1.8	44.8%	-1.1	43.8%	-1.0
4-Year Private Nonprofit	34.1%	-3.9	32.8%	-1.3	32.0%	-0.8	27.7%	-4.2
4-Year Private For-Profit	78.8%	-3.8	78.5%	-0.3	76.1%	-2.4	69.2%	-6.9
2-Year Public	76.1%	-0.9	75.3%	-0.8	74.3%	-1.0	73.6%	-0.7

Table 7 shows the percentage of certificate recipients in each year and category who were first-time graduates. First-time graduates are defined as students who earned a bachelor's degree, associate degree, or certificate as their first postsecondary credential. Each student is counted as a first-time graduate only once, in the academic year of his or her first postsecondary credential. Academic years run from July 1 to June 30. In this report, certificate refers to undergraduate and graduate-level certificates, since it was not possible for institutions to make this distinction in Clearinghouse data submissions prior to 2013-14. Certificate earners with no prior awards are classified as first-time graduates.

NOTES ON THE DATA

Definition of *First-Time Graduate*

The *Undergraduate Degree Earners Report*, published annually by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, provides counts of first-time graduates and graduates with prior awards by institutional sector, award level, age group, and gender. Award recipients are considered to be first-time graduates if the award received in the report year is their first postsecondary award from a U.S. Title IV, degree-granting institution. Each student is counted as a first-time graduate only once, in the academic year of his or her first postsecondary credential. Academic years run from July 1 to June 30. A student who earned two credentials in the year of his or her first credential is counted under the highest credential level earned in that year. For example, if a student whose first award was a certificate received in December 2014 subsequently received an associate's degree in May 2015, he or she would be counted in this report as a first-time graduate at the associate's degree level in academic year 2014-15.

In this report, *certificate* refers to undergraduate and graduate-level certificates, since it was not possible for institutions to make this distinction in Clearinghouse data submissions prior to 2013-14. Certificate earners with no prior awards are classified as first-time graduates.

Degree Coverage and Weighting

The National Student Clearinghouse collects graduation information from its participating institutions via two data reporting services: Enrollment Reporting (ER) and DegreeVerify (DV). Enrollment Reporting has higher data coverage rates, but includes only basic completion information, such as graduation indicator and the date of graduation. DV includes enhanced information on completions, including degree title, major, level, and CIP code, but covered only 91 percent of credentials granted by U.S. Title IV degree-granting institutions as of fall 2015. The overall set of undergraduate degree earners for a particular year is based only on awards reported to DV, but prior award status was assigned using records from both ER and DV. In cases where the prior award did not appear in a DV record (approximately 2.3% of the 2015 bachelors' degree earners, 2.4% of associate degree

earners and 2.2% of certificate earners), the level of the prior award was imputed based on the institution level and related enrollment records. To adjust for the DV participation rate, weights were applied to each degree record included in this report. Weights were derived by calculating the inverse of the rate of degree data coverage for each combination of year, institution sector, award level (bachelor's, associate's, or certificate), and student gender. To obtain degree data coverage for each combination of year, sector, and award level, Clearinghouse degree data were compared to IPEDS Completions data for all U.S. Title IV, degree-granting institutions.

Imputation of Gender

Institutions reported student gender to the Clearinghouse for slightly less than half of all students included in this report. The genders of the remaining students were imputed using a table of name-gender pairs that the Research Center developed using data publicly available from the Census Bureau and the Social Security Administration as well as the institution-reported data. The imputation used only those pairs in which the name had at least two instances and was associated with a single gender in at least 95 percent of the instances. The imputation is accurate in 99.6 percent of the cases with known gender. A detailed document on the development of our approach resides on the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center's "[Working with Our Data](#)" Web page.

Degree-Granting Status

When referencing IPEDS counts of postsecondary awards, it is important to distinguish degree-granting institutions from non-degree-granting institutions. Clearinghouse certificate and degree data, as well as the IPEDS comparison data used for the weighting calculation in this report, are limited to degrees and certificates awarded by U.S. Title IV-eligible, degree-granting institutions.



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